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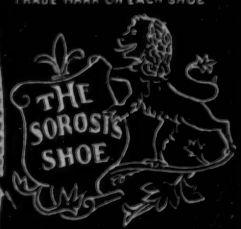

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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No. 36. SEPTEMBER, 1898. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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Holding Down a Homestead.

BY H. W. PHILLIPS.

IN the central part of what is now the State of North Dakota, then in its territorial days, lie the Lake-beds. Long years ago these grassy hollows were fresh-water seas, but as the continent arched its back, like a giant cat stretching, the water poured out, leaving a rich sediment to grow hay for countless cattle.

Here my friend William Teasdale was established as superintendent of a hay camp. He was the type of man who passes through all the Western experiences, from "skinning" mules for the government, to "coyoteing" in dry gulches in the placer district of the Black Hills.

A kindly, generous, brave man was Bill, a good friend, who had both intelligence and sympathy to offer in time of need.

At this time I was holding down a homestead about sixteen miles from the hay camp, and further still from any other neighbor. I lived up to the government's requirements religiously, and stuck it out in my little shack, "all by my lone."

For the first few months things went well with me. I enjoyed the vast solitude, and would have regretted a visitor, but at last the prairie began to be too much for me.

For three months I had not laid eyes on a human being. Prac-

tically, I was marooned in the middle of a grassy ocean. God and I seemed to occupy the country alone. I felt as if the human race had been exterminated, save myself.

Sometimes as I sat in my doorway and looked at the roll upon roll of the buttes, it seemed to me as if the resistless swing of the great waves of ground would pull my soul out of my body.

One morning I "got over the border." As I started for the potato patch, I caught myself talking to people who were not there.

For a moment I was stunned by the discovery. Then I threw down the hoe, slapped the saddle on my cayuse, and tore away as though the devil trailed me, with drops of the cold sweat of panic starting out all over me.

The day was brilliant, but horribly still. The great silence seemed to gather around me like a palpable doom. My teeth chattered. I threw quick glances to left and right behind me as I skimmed over the ground, fearing to see — I do not know what. My straining ears caught no sound but the rapid drumming of the pony's feet. I had a sense of something too dreadful to think of about to happen. Implacable eyes stared at me. A great weight pressed me down on the saddle horn.

Lord, how I rode! My little animal appeared to catch the infection of fear.

Never will I forget the gulp of joy that nearly strangled me when at last I saw Teasdale quietly standing before his tent munching a piece of bread and butter.

I threw myself from my horse and ran over to him. I clutched him with both trembling hands.

"Good Lord! what's the matter, Kid?" he said jokingly, "Injuns jump you?"

"No!" I answered. "But out there, Bill! there isn't anything! There isn't anybody! O God! what a country!" My nerves gave way and I cried like a baby.

His face changed instantly.

"Oh-ho-he!" he said softly. "A touch of the prairie, eh? We've all had it, Kid. Now go right in the tent and see if you can't lay down for awhile."

I tried to obey him, but the thing was impossible. I could not

keep still. If I closed my eyes the horror came over me with redoubled force. After a few moments I was obliged to give it up and come out again.

Bill looked at me with anxious eyes.

"No go?" said he.

I shook my head.

"Now, see here, Kid," said he, "here's where you've got to make a fight. If you let this get the best of you, your goose is cooked as far as this country's concerned. Now, let's see; I ain't got a deck of cards nor nothing to take your mind off, and you've *got* to put your attention on something else, so let's play a game of mumble-ty-peg."

We went at that boy's game with the utmost seriousness. Mindful of Bill's injunction, I played as though my life depended on it.

Really, it was a much better idea than it seemed, because it brought up cheery memories of school days in God's country that did much to lay my ghost, and by the time Bill had defeated me, and I had to grub for the peg, I began to feel ashamed of my emotion, and was quite becoming myself again.

Not altogether though, as an occasional shudder testified.

Bill noted my improvement with satisfaction.

"That's the stuff!" he said heartily. "Every man has his scare thrown into him at some time or other, but only the coward gives in to it. Now it sorter braces a feller up when he's down to hear of somebody that's had a worse time than he's had, and I think if I tell you about something I come across once, you'll feel more contented to go back to your own little shanty — not but what you're welcome to stay here a year if you want to, but I know you don't want to cave in — so I'll give you what I know of the history of Captain Jack.

"It came up this way. I'd been working for the 'bar 3' outfit. Got paid off. Got full and busted inside of three days. Then I slid down to the *Chanta-seché*, and struck 'em for a job. The supe said that they had all the punchers they needed, but if I wanted to hold down a mower for awhile they'd make it an object to me — twenty cases a month — and I closed with 'em. Next morning the supe started me off with my team.

"'There's where you've got to cut,' says he, pointing to a piece of bottom land about three miles off. 'Got a gun with you?'

"'Lord! no!' says I, 'what do I want a gun to cut a little grass for' — I just naturally hate a man that's always packing a gun.

"'Do you see that shack?' says the supe. 'Yes? Well, the old ram that lives there thinks he owns the whole durned country. He's cut up nasty two or three times — can't tell what he'll do — loft full of dust from living alone or something. Better heel yourself.'

"But I wouldn't listen to it. I didn't know what I was up against.

"'All right,' the supe says, 'no skin off me. Don't stir the poor old devil up, though. I suppose he'll die most God-awful sudden some day, but there's no use of hurrying things. Well, get a gait on you and cut some grass for the company.'

"So away I went.

"The last thing the supe sung out after me was, 'Keep clear of Captain Jack!'

"'All right,' I says, but I didn't do it, just the same.

"After I first struck the bottom, I brought down the grass in good shape for awhile, sat up straight on the mower, and hollered at the horses as business-like as could be, meanwhile keeping a leery eye out for my friend.

"But pretty soon I got all-fired sleepy. I hadn't had much rest during my three-day bender up in town, and the sun was as hot as Fourth o' July in hell, and the old machine buzzed away like a swarm of bees, and altogether it wasn't long before the sleep just came and sat right down on me.

"I wiggled my legs and jammed the hat on the back of my head, to pry my eyes open, but it was no use; the ground floated around in spite of me, and next news I got, I was staring straight at a little, round, red-faced old man, whose white whiskers stood out like an angry cat's, and he was laying me out 'til further orders.

"Talk about being surprised! Well, I sat there with my mouth open, while he called me all the thieves and pirates and truck that he could lay his tongue to.

"It riled me to get cussed like that for nothing at all, so finally I come to enough to say, 'Perhaps you ain't feeling very well this morning, Captain?'

"Old Jack,—for it was the captain all right enough,—wasn't in the humor to listen to any joshing, and at that, he raised the double-barreled shot gun that he'd brought with him to back his arguments, and let her flicker both barrels.

"I wasn't there, however. Guessing what was likely to happen, I swung off behind the mower; but the crack of the gun startled the horses and away they flew, leaving me squatted there, without any cover.

"I started to tackle the old gent with a monkey-wrench that dropped off the mower, but before I could get hold of it, he unlimbered the great-granddaddy of all the six-shooters that I ever saw, and opened fire.

"The debate was closed. He had the floor, and the earth, too, if he wanted it. I moved swiftly away from there, with the old man imitating me to the best of his ability.

"I headed for a big rock-pile on the other side of the valley—you know, one of them things that Foster calls 'moraines,' thinking that when I reached the top of it, if the old man didn't get me in the meantime, I could change the cut a little.

"I made it with no worse damage than a burn in the left leg, for while the captain's intentions were good enough, his shooting was of a poor quality.

"Up the side of that wall I scrambled, madder than a wet hen, and cussing like a tom-cat. When I got on top, I whirled around and let the rocks fly at the old man with both hands.

"I wondered why he didn't fire on me, as I was a good mark, standing up against the sky, and then I tumbled to the fact that his ammunition must have given out.

"'Now!' thinks I, 'you're my meat!' I grabbed a couple of rocks and charged down the wall like a landslide.

"When the old man saw me coming in all my glory, he turned tail and dusted for home again.

"I pasted after him as fast as I could swing a leg, and he stepped high, wide, and frolicsome, now, I tell you.

"We had a fast heat, but to save my life I couldn't close with

him. He was just out of rock-shot, and kept there, although I sprained my stomach trying to gain a little.

"I never saw a sixty-year-old run like he did. His long white hair snapped in the breeze, and you could have played billiards on his coattail.

"He dove into his shack like a rabbit in his burrow, to come out a second later with a Winchester in his hands.

"That brought me up short. Rocks against a rifle isn't a good game. I hustled to get out of range, wondering to myself whether the old gent and me were going to play 'tag' between his house and the moraine for the rest of the day.

"But the captain was done. He just stood in his doorway and puffed like a buffalo.

"I made my escape in good shape, took a circle around, and started after the team. As I hadn't raised the cutter-bar, they left a trail behind them that a blind man could follow, in the shape of a five-foot swath right through grass and brush and everything.

"Beyond getting touched up from a nest of yellow jackets that they'd cut in two, and the ten-mile walk, I got 'em without any trouble. They were in a *coulée*, quietly feeding, when I came up.

"Then I pulled out for the ranch, feeling like old Farmer Scrubrub's hired man, who

> "'Went out to make some hay,
> He ran his scythe in a hornet's nest,
> And knocked off for the day.'

"That night in the bull pen we talked of nothing else but Captain Jack. All the boys had some yarn or other about him.

"Bronch' Thompson said the old gent used to play the fiddle nights. Bronch' was a great hand for music, so he went over to call on the captain. The old man received him nicely and they had a pleasant evening, for Jack knew how to work the 'fid' to the queen's taste.

"He invited Bronch' to come over next night. Bronch' went, and when he got within a hundred yards of his cabin, the captain bored a hole through his hat.

"He didn't miss the head by over an inch, and Bronch' was red hot.

"'What's the matter with you, you darned old fool?' he yelled, as he picked up his broad brim.

"'Oh! that's only a little way I've got,' says the captain.

"'That so?' says Bronch'. 'Well, I've got a little way myself,' and he opened on him with his six-shooter.

"The captain slammed the door to, and that's all there was of that. But Bronch' thought it was the darnedest, meanest trick he'd ever heard of.

"Then the supe told of the captain's coming over one day and telling him that the *Chanta-seché* would have to pull its freight out of the country.

"The supe humored him and asked for reasons.

"Then they saw what ailed the old boy. Says he, 'The Angel Michael came to my shack the other night, and gave me a deed to the United States. The Lord is a man of war — I must drive you away from here.'

"Crazy, you see; crazy as a bed-bug.

"Well, I went on cutting grass after that, and gave Jack a wide berth. In fact, I forgot all about him, until one day two of the boys came up from town with their skins full of red-eye, and looking for excitement.

"Nothing would do but they must go and stir up the captain. Bronch' and I argued with them, but it didn't have any effect, so we went along with them to see that no serious mischief was done.

"When we got to the shack everything was still.

"'Come out of that, Captain Jack, proprietor of the United States and some counties not heard from!' yells one of the boys.

"No answer.

"We hollered again, but no sound came from the shack.

"'Let's bust the door down, and draw the old badger out,' says somebody; so down goes the door, and in we all flew.

"Then we stopped in our tracks, for, spread on its back, looking straight up as if to find out why, lay the dead body of the captain.

"We all sure felt queer. Not but what we had seen plenty of dead men in our time, but it knocked us in a heap to go out to have a little fun with a man and find him a corpse.

"'Is he dead?' says the youngest feller in the crowd.

"'And a hole in him that a cat could crawl through,' answers Bronch'. 'Well, I reckon.'

"'Lord! Let's get out of this!' I says, and we piled out in a hurry.

"We held a council of war, because although Jack had been a durned nuisance, this killing was dirty work, and we didn't propose to have any such on the *Chanta-seché* while we were running it.

"None of our boys would take a hand in a job like that, we felt sure, and as there weren't many people in the country, we were soon able to locate on the parties that did it.

"Everything pointed to two Swedes that lived about four miles down the creek. They had had a 'turn-up' with Jack, and one of our lads remembered having heard the oldest Swede say that he'd 'fix' the old man some day.

"That settled it in our minds.

"'Now,' says Bronch', 'we'll hunt for sign, and if we can bring it down to the Swedes, they'll do a can-can in the air, with the full support of the company — and a lariat,' says he.

"We spread out to hunt. We found tracks leading to a corner of the cabin, where the chinking had been pulled from between the logs, so that a man could stick a gun through, and then deeper and wider tracks leading away, as if the murderer had run off after his job was done.

"We followed the back trail, Bronch' in the lead. Suddenly Bronch' stopped so short that I smashed my nose against the back of his head.

"'What the devil is the matter with you?' says I.

"'Hs-sh!' he says. 'Look there!'

"I looked where he pointed, and saw the body of another man, all kinder tumbled up, with its face jammed in the mud.

"We rushed up and turned it over. Sure enough, it was one of the Swedes — dead — deader than old Pharaoh, and not a mark on him. No, sir, not a mark. We stripped him to the buff, and searched and hunted, but there wasn't a thing to show how he came to his end.

"It was a mighty strange thing and we didn't know what to make of it.

"'Hold on!' says one of the younger boys, 'I'll skin back to the ranch and get Foster.'

"Foster, you know, came out of college with honors. There were precious few things he couldn't tell you about. Darn good feller, Foster, and a son-of-a-gun on learning.

"Pretty soon the kid came back with old Brick-top, both of 'em larruping their cayuses to beat the deck.

"'What kind of lay-out is this?' says Fos'. We told him what we knew, and he examined the Swede.

"'Heart failure,' says he. 'I reckon this chap didn't find murder such a funny game, after he tried it.'

"And that was a true word. I can imagine how the Swede went up to the cabin, grinding his teeth, and hugging himself as he thought of the satisfaction he was going to get.

"And then, I can fancy how he stumbled away, half running, half falling down, with his knees giving out beneath him, thinking of what was left behind, praying and cussing fast to himself and wishing that he'd died before he ever did such a piece of work.

"Probably, he had something wrong with his heart in the first place, and the excitement he'd been under for weeks while he was heating himself up to the shooting-point hadn't done him a bit of good.

"Then, after he pulled the trigger, the murderer's sickness came down on him — sick of himself — sick of life — sick of everything — and gave his heart an extra twist. Snap! she goes, and down comes his shanty.

"I tell you, slaughtering people ain't what it is cracked up to be. The kind of feller that can kill his man before breakfast, stroke his silky moustache, and go about his business the same as if nothing had happened, only lives in dime novels; at least, I never ran up against his kind on the prairie.

"I've had nine gun fights all told, so I reckon I know what I'm talking about.

"I thank God that none of my men died, although it was a near thing with one of 'em, but he nearly blew my light out for the matter of that — bored me right through the chest, and I was in bed for a month.

"The man that kills another man ain't ever going to get over it. The finish of old Jack's story will throw some light on that.

"Well, after we finished the Swede's autopsy, we searched the cabin to see if we could get any clue to who and what the captain was.

"We found something that I'll get out of my dunnage-box in a minute and show you. You'll see then what that poor old devil went through.

"Everything in the cabin was as neat and shining as though a woman lived there. The clothes were carefully darned and mended, and the kitchen truck was so bright that you could see your face in it.

"Then there were some curtains and little fixings that gave the place a 'homey' kind of look. I reckon old Jack was well brought up.

"It was pitiful to think of that lonesome, old crazy man keeping things so neat, with not another eye to see it but his own, winter and summer, year in and year out, and he in the middle of the prairie. You know what that's like now, eh, Kid? and your conscience was clean, too. Think of what — wait, I'll get the books."

Bill arose and went into the tent. Presently he returned with a half dozen leather-covered memorandum books in his hand.

"This is what we found in a cupboard in the cabin," he said. "Look careful at 'em, Kid. There's a terrible lot of trouble set down in a curious way in those little books. Here's the first one."

He handed it to me. It was marked on the outside in good bold penmanship "John Winthrope Barrington" — Captain Jack's name under different circumstances of life. Beneath the name was the date "1873–74."

I opened it and read the first entry — to me a most astonishing one; judge for yourself. Here it is.

"August 13. One year ago to-day I killed my best friend. The murderer's hell is in his own breast. May God have mercy on my soul."

All the succeeding entries were merely the date, and a repetition of the last two sentences.

So page after page the simple horror of that record ran. Written neatly, carefully blotted, all as methodical as the entries some snuffy old clerk might make in his ledger.

What a strange mind the man must have had! I thought of him, living in such deadly loneliness with his crime, jotting down his monotonous remorse. Perhaps moving his pen slowly by the light of his evening candle, which, soon after extinguished, left him face to face, in the darkness in the vast solitude of the prairie, with his conscience and his God.

A chilliness traced down my spine.

"Are they all like this?" I asked Teasdale as I returned the book.

"All but this one," he answered, "and this is the last."

I took it from him. The date on the outside was 1879 — three years previous to the time of which I am writing.

For the first two months, the same two sentences appeared. Then on March the 6th came this: —

"I am going mad."

Again I thought of that lonely cabin, and shivered.

That entry continued for a month. Just those four words each day. Then on April 13th came a statement that made my hair prickle at its roots.

"April 13. Spring and flowers. Warm air. Thank God! *I am mad!*"

Could such a thing be? May a man be crazed and know it?

Evidently it was so. John Winthrope Barrington had no purpose to serve but the truth when he wrote. He never thought of any eye but his own seeing that record of his sufferings, so peculiarly Anglo-Saxon in its restraint.

I turned over the other pages of the book. They were filled with rough sketches of a man being hanged. Some had the tongue protruding from the mouth. In others the eyes were rolling. All had the limbs contorted in various ways. A touch of horrible drollery marked them. They were not good to see.

"My own little shack seems like the home of peace and contentment, in contrast, Bill," I said, as I passed the book back. "What was the end?"

"The end?" he answered with raised eyebrows, "Why, we

buried 'em, of course. Who Jack was, or where he came from, we never discovered. The Swede's pardner skipped the country, so that left him on our hands.

"We planted them both in a mound on the bottom. Foster planed off a board, and wrote an epitaph on it. We stuck the board up between them — here's what it said. I made a copy of it in the last book to keep the history together. Here it is."

I looked over his shoulder and read:

> *"To the right lies Captain Jack, who killed a man, and regretted it. To the left lies Knut Anderson, who killed Captain Jack. Whoever you are, this is God's business, not yours. Pass on."*

The Clasp of Fire.

BY CARRIE E. GARRETT.

TWO men sat in the splendid library of the Orloff Palace, discussing with terrible solemnity certain papers which lay on a table before them. The pallor of their faces, their whispered talk, and the fact that the doors had been locked and the curtains closely drawn — all seemed to have deep significance in that troubled period when treason was rife in the empire, and the crown trembled between the contending claims of the Emperor and the Pretender.

Prince Boris, the older man, sat in the shadow, and the uncertain flashes of firelight revealed his face against the background of a purple curtain as pallid, withered, and with a certain malice twinkling in his rat-like black eyes. Age spoke eloquently in obesity, puffy eyelids, and leathery cheek, but he wore the gorgeous clothing of a young exquisite of that period, and his small rotund person sparkled with splendid jewels.

The face of the other man, Prince Orloff, was pale, earnest, resolute — in striking contrast to the mocking countenance of his companion. If these two men were leagued together in any undertaking, one instinctively felt that their motives were widely different. The one might be moved by a noble zeal for what he believed to be the right, but the other's impulse was almost certain to be one of private greed.

In another section of the library, but securely screened from this room, the Princess Helene sat languidly dictating letters to her secretary, Valdor. Her jeweler received orders for the resetting of certain pearls, her costumer for the creation of a robe of maize velvet, and numerous business, social, and even amorous communications were answered with a comprehensive brevity rare in a woman. The secretary wrote rapidly in a singular small, slanting hand, did not lift his eyes from the paper even during

pauses, and seemed unaware that the eyes of the princess were resting upon his face with a certain condescending admiration. His profile was noble, fine, severe. He had the creamy olive complexion of the Castilian, intensely dark eyes, and his hair and full beard were of a peculiar brownish gold color.

He was a newcomer in the Orloff household, and very little was known concerning his history. He had by an act of great daring saved the princess from being dragged to death by a runaway horse. He seemed needy, and much gold was offered him, but he firmly refused it, whereupon the princess imperiously ordered him to name some reward which he would accept. The result of all this was that he was employed as her highness' secretary — a degree higher in the social scale of the palace than the footmen, a little lower, perhaps, than the princess' confidential maid.

That she, a daughter of the house of Orloff, a Boyar, the names of whose ancestors were written in the Velvet Book — that she could feel the faintest ripple of personal interest in such a man — a menial in her household — would never have occurred to the Princess Helene. She scattered favors with a free and royal hand, but her inferiors must never forget for an instant the immeasurable distance between her and themselves. She approved the rare personal graces of her secretary in much the same fashion that a king might have remarked with pleasure a fine blush on the cheek of a scullery maid. She admired him as though he had been a handsome horse or dog. She would have laughed at the suggestion that there could be any danger in her giving free reign to such admiration.

Besides, the princess had been a very ice queen in her impassivity. Ambition was confessedly her only passion, and in the affairs of the heart she laughed at her facile victories and was merciless to the vanquished. She knew the power of her beauty — that strange dazzling fairness which is so potent to sway the passions of men, and she used it ruthlessly when it pleased her to do so, but she had that rare thing at twenty — a heart yet unstirred. She had felt transient ripples of emotion in her early girlhood, had cherished some romantic dreams and fancies, but now she was a woman and regarded herself as cured of the petty follies of youth, of which she regarded love as the chiefest. She despised it as the plaything of fools, and gloried in her freedom

from its dominion. She was intensely proud, vain, and ambitious. Her life had been cloudless, brilliant, victorious, and she was a stranger to suffering. She had received everything and given nothing.

The guileless Lady Sophie, who was fathoms deep in love with a dashing officer in the Imperial Guards, wondered in her soul why her cousin Helene should be betrothed to such an ugly, withered, malicious old man as Prince Boris. One day she hinted as much to the princess, timidly, for it seemed very presumptuous for her to question the wisdom of so brilliant and wonderful a personage as Helene. The princess only laughed indulgently.

"The prince has certain great virtues," she said. "He has unbounded influence in the empire; he is fabulously rich and can give me a position second only to that of an empress. What more can a woman ask?"

"But — but, your happiness, *love* —" faltered the Lady Sophie, all her ideals trembling at such shocking heresy.

"Happiness is a fable," the princess said with disdain. "As for love, I know nothing of it. It seems to have power over the hearts of most women, but I have never felt it."

"Helene," said the Lady Sophie solemnly, with the prescience of experience, "some day you will love — *terribly*."

Prince Boris, conscious that he had no graces of mind or person wherewith to charm his betrothed bride, sought to dazzle her with jewels. Sparkling diamonds and ropes of pearls he laid at the feet of the princess, in acknowledgment of which she flung him an occasional gracious speech or rare smile. She knew how to make her favors precious to her lovers.

To-day he brought her a curious golden clasp so thickly set with fine rubies that it seemed to burn like a coal of fire as it lay in her small white hand.

"There is only one other like it," the prince said, "and that is among the crown jewels. His highness allowed me to have it copied before he left to go on that strange expedition into the Caucasus. He regards it as a talisman and always carries it about his person. It is known as the 'Clasp of Fire.'"

"I am delighted with it," the princess said, "both on account of its beauty and its history. I thank you, prince."

He bent low over her hand and kissed it lingeringly, for it was rare that he received even such small crumbs of favor. He wished very much to talk to her at this propitious moment, and looked impatiently at the secretary. As it happened, he had never before seen this recent appendage to the household, and he shot a keen glance at the handsome head of the stranger whose back was turned to him.

"Send the fellow away, my princess," he said in an audible whisper, bending over her.

The princess started, an angry blush burned in her cheek, and she looked quickly at the secretary, but his face was calm, impassive, bent over the papers on the desk before him. The only reply she gave her lover was a haughty shake of her head. At this moment the secretary arose with averted face.

"Will madam excuse me?" he asked quietly.

"No," she replied coolly; "there are more letters."

The secretary resumed his place and the prince turned away, a white rage creeping over his features.

"Will you ride with me to-day?" he asked in a quivering voice, controlling his anger.

"Not to-day, prince," was the reply in an indescribable tone of cool negligence.

The white wrath in his face changed to a violent crimson, he drew himself up as tall as nature would allow him, and walked out of the room with the swelled strut of an enraged turkey cock.

The princess leaned back in her chair and smiled with conscious power — with the tolerance with which one might regard the useless anger of a punished child. She was accustomed to lashing her lovers into a rage as a salutary measure. She was like a lovely and mischievous child with that faint sparkle of malicious laughter in her eyes, the color on her cheek just dying off to a pale blush.

Glancing toward the secretary, she saw that he was regarding her with a strange, melancholy gaze. It was so prolonged and steady that unconsciously her face burned under it and her lashes drooped to hide a certain faltering of her eyes which were usually so tranquil. In an instant, however, those eyes were flashing with anger.

"You forget yourself, M. Valdor," she said in a tone of haughty rebuke.

"Pardon, noble princess," he said, and his tone was rather that of a courtier than an inferior. "Yours would seem to be a radiant destiny, and yet — I was wondering whether you are — happy."

She looked at him in complete astonishment. That her secretary — a servant in her house — should presume to discuss her happiness, her destiny!

An indefinable change had come over the face of the secretary. There seemed to be a newly found dignity and power in his presence which she felt uneasily but could not understand. The eyes bent upon her — stern yet tender — seemed to control her as though by a spell and to still upon her lips the angry words she was about to utter. She shook off this feeling, however, and rose from her seat.

"Enough," she said with authority, though her voice trembled slightly. "You saved my life and I am not ungrateful, but you must know that I never permit liberties from any one."

The secretary rose also and bowed profoundly, yet did not quail at her rebuke.

"If your highness is ever so slightly in my debt for that service," he said gravely, "grant me this recompense. Permit me to read your horoscope — not in the signs of the zodiac, but in that open page where the soul's ideals are written. Even through the glamour of matchless beauty one may read in the face of the Princess Helene the signs of exalted pride and boundless ambition — the signs of a restless spirit yet unsubdued by pain or love."

The princess, listening against her will, her dignity outraged, trembled and stood at bay. She shrank, half scared, and a wave of color swept over her face as the secretary bent nearer, his eyes dangerously tender and his voice low and impassioned.

"Your destiny is love," he whispered. "Your ambitions will be as so many lifeless stones in your path. As love only can make you happy, so love only can make you wise or good."

"And where did you learn all this, most wise seer?" she asked, with an effort to shake off the lethargy which seemed to be creeping over her.

"It is written in your face," he said, "which is beautiful but cold. Your soul is asleep, Princess Helene. Who shall awaken it?"

How did it happen? Who can tell? Not a word more was spoken, but the small, soft hand of Princess Helene, blazing with the jewels of Prince Boris, the hand of a Boyar, whose name was written in the Velvet Book—the hand that disdained love and craved only power, lay unresistingly in the firm clasp of the secretary.

"You love me?" he whispered. And compellingly he drew her close into his arms and kissed her.

At this the spell was suddenly and violently broken. Whatever subtle and powerful means he had used to subdue the princess to his will, the touch of the first lover's kiss upon her lips aroused with a quick shock all her sleeping energies. Her senses awoke with a keen realization of her mad folly and of the utter and amazing audacity of the man who had dared for a moment to forget who she was. Despising herself for her weakness, her anger burned the more hotly toward her tempter.

"Insolent!" she stammered in a voice hoarse with excitement, and she struck him from her with a passionate gesture. "Slave! Dog! I will have you whipped!"

She broke out sobbing in her terrible anger, the kiss burned upon her lips, and she writhed at the ineffaceable disgrace of it.

"Why do you torture yourself?" the secretary asked compassionately, as if to a wayward child. "You love at last. Yield yourself to it and you will be happier than you can dream."

Maddened at his cool insolence, she sprang toward the door, but he had anticipated this movement and placed himself where he could prevent her leaving the room. Her first impulse was to scream, but her pride shrunk from making a scene which might involve an exposure of her own folly. So she stood irresolute—flushed, trembling, and more beautiful than ever.

"You shall suffer for this outrage," she cried in a stifled voice.

"You also will suffer," he said with some sadness. "When the time comes, remember I would have spared you a part of your punishment, but you have chosen to defy me. Farewell, Princess Helene. No, give me your hand. I will have it! It is useless to resist!"

But she did resist with all her strength, her eyes blazing and her cheeks burning like an insulted queen.

"Very well," he said with cool determination. "You will not give me your hand. I will *take* a better adieu!"

He caught her in his arms and held her firmly for an instant, smiling at her useless resistance. "My beautiful rebel!" he exclaimed. "Must I punish you too?" By some wild impulse which she could not resist, she yielded to him for an instant; then wrenching herself from him she screamed for help.

In an instant startled voices were heard in the corridor, the door was flung violently open, and Prince Boris entered the room with hurried alarm, followed by Prince Orloff, Lady Sophie, and her lover, Lieutenant Ivan. Servants came running and clustered at the doors, but these were quickly shut out.

"This man has been insolent to me!" the princess exclaimed in a loud trembling voice, in answer to the hurried questions poured upon her, and she pointed to the secretary who stood facing them all, pale, but composed and majestic in bearing.

"Insolent!" exclaimed several voices in horror.

Prince Orloff strode wrathfully toward the offender, but he was too late. Prince Boris had flown at the secretary and begun to pummel him violently, without, however, making much impression. The secretary bore this treatment with singular passiveness, merely warding off the blows.

The prince danced around his tall adversary in an ecstasy of rage.

"Down on your knees! Dog!" he exclaimed, eager to distinguish himself in the presence of the princess by avenging her wrongs, and in his frantic efforts to reduce the secretary to an attitude of abasement, he dragged at his clothing in a most unscientific manner, and actually succeeded in tearing off his outer garment — a dark green coat.

Now the secretary wore under this coat a white linen blouse and across his breast was a ribbon fastened with a golden clasp set with rubies. When Prince Boris caught sight of the jewel, he fairly stuttered in his excitement.

"Look, look!" he cried out, pointing to the clasp on the secretary's breast. "The fellow is a common thief. He has stolen the ruby clasp which I gave to the Princess Helene."

"No!" the princess said in a clear voice. "I have the clasp here in my hand."

It was Lieutenant Ivan who suddenly started forward, his mouth opening in indescribable horror. He seized the valiant and perspiring prince by the arm and shouted in a loud terrified voice: —

"Great God! Can you not see? It is the EMPEROR!"

His disguise cast aside, the master of the situation stood like a statue, with his arms folded, the jewel burning on the breast of his white blouse. Not one in that room but was bent low in homage, in submission, and terror. The dropping of a pin might have been heard in the dead and ominous silence. His majesty's stern and pitiless eye rested on the Princes Orloff and Boris who knelt at his feet, their faces livid, the sweat of agony standing on their foreheads.

"So you see, I did *not* go into the Caucasus, Prince Boris," the Emperor said mockingly to the cringing prince. "I preferred to stay here and unravel your secrets."

The wretched man bowed lower and was silent.

"And you, too," and there was more of sad reproach than anger in the Emperor's voice as he turned to the despairing Prince Orloff.

"Sire —" he began.

"It is too late," said the Emperor solemnly.

A moment later, by a signal, the Orloff Palace was crowded with armed men and the Emperor gave orders for the disposition of the prisoners.

"Princes Orloff and Boris to be removed to the Vámbéry prison, to await their trial for high treason.

"The Princess Helene and the Lady Sophie to be removed to the imperial palace and confined there at the Emperor's pleasure.

"Lieutenant Ivan to be removed to the military prison."

The Princess Helene bent her proud head at the feet of the Emperor, and with pallid cheek and broken voice begged to be allowed to follow her father to prison, but this petition was peremptorily refused.

"Sire," said the unhappy Orloff, made bold by the sight of his daughter's suffering, "I entreat your majesty not to punish the innocent with the guilty. My daughter and the Lady Sophie are

entirely innocent. So also is Lieutenant Ivan. I implore your majesty to spare these young people."

"Full justice shall be done both to the innocent and the guilty," the Emperor said sternly, and he motioned the guards to lead the prisoners away.

. . . . . .

Six months elapsed. The despairing and remorseful Prince Orloff died in prison, and by the Emperor's permission his daughter was with him in his last moments. Prince Boris was to be banished for life and his vast wealth confiscated to the crown. Lieutenant Ivan and Lady Sophie were cleared of any implication, but the latter voluntarily shared her cousin's imprisonment in the palace.

Of all the prisoners, only the Princess Helene's fate was yet undecided, and as the Emperor had at last gone on that expedition into the Caucasus, where there was to be a battle for the crown, there was no certainty when she would learn what would become of her.

Strange lessons had the haughty princess learned in these six months — lessons of vanquished pride, of bitter shame, and grief, and the slow misery of patience. At first she was like a mad thing in her agony, beating herself against the walls of her prison, cursing her fate and praying for death. But when day after day passed and nothing came of her struggles, she sank into a sort of stupor of despair and wept wearily and hopelessly. Her father's death came as a last crushing blow. Everything that made life dear — honor, station, wealth — had been swept away. Her proud head drooped and her splendid young beauty grew wan and dim.

As to the love which had swept over her life for one brief moment, she dared not think of it. Had he played with her, had he deliberately won her heart only to conquer her? Had she (and oh, this was an agonized thought!) — had she all unconsciously *won* the heart of her sovereign and by her own act lost it forever? She remembered now the vague sweet pleasure which she had felt at his mere presence, and a thousand other intangible signs which she in her blindness had failed to recognize as the beginning of love.

She awaited the return of the Emperor. What would be his vengeance on the daughter of the fallen Orloff, the daughter of a conspirator against the crown, the betrothed wife of a traitor?

Her prison was a splendid one. She was surrounded with all the luxuries befitting her rank, but she was not permitted to leave her apartments or to communicate with any one. In the palace of the Emperor, which was a small world in itself and a very gay and populous one, her isolation was complete. But she had a precious little comforter in the Lady Sophie with her irrepressible gaiety and her proneness to see the sunny side of things. Yet she was a child — one to whom it was impossible for the princess to reveal the real depths of her despair — the despair of a proud woman who first tastes humiliation.

The Pretender's claims had been suddenly cancelled by his death in the conflict. The Emperor returned from his expedition with victory on his banner, his enemies silenced forever.

The Princess Helene was commanded to appear before her sovereign at noon on the day after his arrival at the palace.

Who shall say what were her emotions as she obeyed the summons? She was about to kneel as a suppliant for mercy — for her very life, perhaps — at the feet of a man who had been her servant, upon whom she had heaped indignities, and whose love she had spurned. But even in this hour, her native pride reared itself as a crest, she shook off her apathy of despair, and hid her broken spirit behind a haughty and rebellious mien. She was attired in one of her most splendid gowns, and excitement lent brilliancy to her beauty.

It was not a meek penitent who knelt before the Emperor. It was a rebel — wounded and snared — but a rebel still. And he recognized this fact and hardened his heart against her.

The audience chamber was one of the most gorgeous rooms in the palace. Seated in a throne-like chair elevated on a dais, dressed in imperial robes, and surrounded by all the trappings of state, it was difficult to fancy that this dark, stern, princely looking man and the deferential secretary Valdor were one and the same.

The Emperor surveyed his regal-looking prisoner with an air of business-like composure, which was more cutting than any he could have assumed, for it bespoke indifference.

"You were betrothed to Prince Boris, I believe?" he said without preamble or greeting of any kind.

She merely bowed in assent. The fact that he ignored her rank and her sex struck home like a hot iron, but she made no sign.

"You know that the prince is to be exiled and his wealth confiscated?"

She bowed again.

"Stripped of honor and everything material, it seems cruel to deprive him of the consolation of love," the Emperor said mockingly and with meaning.

All her efforts for composure could not conceal the deadly whiteness which spread over her face at the significance of these words.

"A true woman will not desert her lover even in poverty and disgrace," the Emperor continued pitilessly. "She will love him all the more in adversity, will share his exile, and comfort him for the loss of friends and fortune."

"Your majesty would not compel me to marry Prince Boris!" she exclaimed, and there was indignant agony and reproach in her voice, and her proud eyes burned with tears.

"But why not?" the Emperor said, smiling with gentle irony. "Has your love for him been utterly swept away because of the change in his fortunes? Is the love of woman so mutable — so inconstant as this?"

"I will choose death a thousand times rather than such a fate!" she said with passionate misery.

"You forget," the Emperor said severely, "that if it is my will that you shall marry him, there is no choice for you but to obey. The prince must be punished, but I would not separate true lovers. You shall share his exile."

He turned away from her as though the interview were over. But with a low cry she had thrown herself at his feet in an agony of supplication.

"I implore your majesty to command my death!" she said wildly.

"I shall not punish you with death," he said coldly, "for I believe you to be innocent of aught save arrogant pride and thorough heartlessness. We do not punish these with death, despicable as they are."

She bent her head humbly at these cruel words and was silent. She tasted at that moment a punishment more bitter, perhaps, than any which his hand could have dealt her.

"You craved only wealth and power," the Emperor continued sternly. "For these you betrothed yourself to a man utterly unworthy of your love or respect — a man whom you knew to be a mean, false knave. When for an instant love seemed to cross your path, you struck it away with contempt because you thought it was obscure and promised you no honors or treasure. What should be the punishment of such a woman, Princess Helene?"

Her eyes were raised to his with a passionate appeal in their sorrowful depths, as though praying dumbly for mercy.

"Answer me!" he said, and in his severe countenance there was no sign of relenting.

"Death were a welcome punishment," she said, with quivering lip. "I entreat your majesty to pardon my past errors and put an end to my misery."

"You never loved Prince Boris?" he said after a moment's pause.

"Never, Sire." And her head drooped in shame.

"Whom do you love?"

She was silent.

"Speak!" he said imperiously. "What does your heart say?"

"It says that I have ever despised Prince Boris," she cried passionately, "that I despise myself still more, that —" she paused with an appealing look.

"That what?"

"Sire —"

"I am waiting."

"I crave your majesty's pardon," she said humbly, "but a woman may not always speak as her heart dictates."

"She may if she is bidden to do so by her sovereign," he said pointedly.

She blushed and trembled at the implied command, struggled visibly with embarrassment, and tried to speak. Not by word or look did he aid her in this conflict with pride, but stood gravely waiting.

"If I have been so mad and vain as to dare to love your

majesty," she said with painful effort, "I have done so hopelessly."

"Helene!" said the Emperor, and she lifted her eyes with quick amaze at the change in his voice. The sternness had vanished from his face, and he was regarding her with a look of grave tenderness. He took her hand, and she arose and stood before him, trembling, hoping wildly, yet fearing.

"You were ever a rebel," he said. "You refuse to obey me and marry Prince Boris. Very well. Know that it is dangerous to defy the Emperor of the realm. You shall marry either the exiled prince" —

And he paused, smiled, and knelt suddenly at her feet

— "Or Valdor!"

A Soft Soap Affair.

BY C. B. LEWIS.

FARMER TOBIAS JOHNSON came up the path from the barn with a big tin pail of milk in his hand, and passing it in at the kitchen door to his wife, who stood waiting to receive it, he went to the rain barrel at the corner of the house and washed his hands. Instead of going inside to wipe them on the kitchen towel, he flirted the water off his hands and let them dry in the warm evening air as he looked at the blossoming peach trees scattered about. Presently he sat down on the steps, and when the woman inside had put away the last pan of milk, he said: —

"Mariar, what about Sue?"

"Well, what about her?" queried the wife, as she came to the door and looked down upon him.

"Somethin's wrong, I take it," he said after awhile.

"I don't see as there is anything wrong. Sue's got spunk, same as I have, and she won't let nobody walk on her. If she did I'd be the first to get mad about it. A girl who hain't got spunk don't amount to nothin'."

"There's a difference between havin' spunk and bein' foolish, I take it," said the farmer as he tore a sliver off the top step and began breaking it up in his fingers.

"Well, Tobias Johnson, our Sue ain't nobody's fool, and you needn't worry about it," replied the wife in earnest tones. "It ain't any of your business, anyway! What have you got to do with young folkses' quarrels?"

"Sam Andrews is a pretty likely feller, seems to me."

"But he ain't the only one in all this world, not by a jug-full! Our Sue needn't break her heart over him for fear nobody else'll come along. She's only got to nod her head to have half a dozen beaux. What you takin' up for Sam Andrews for?"

"I ain't exactly takin' up, Mariar," replied the husband as he half turned towards her, "but it seems foolish-like for Sue to get mad and mop the airth with him. They've bin lovin' away for two whole years, and you know they was expectin' to get married in the fall. I've knowed all about it for a month, though I hain't said nothin'. Sue's cryin' half the time, and Sam's spendin' half his nights walkin' up and down the road and lookin' at our house. He used to be here every night in the week, but now he dasn't come at all."

"Tobias Johnson, I am surprised!" exclaimed the wife as she got a little nearer to him.

"What about?"

"That you should have a single word to say about this matter. It ain't none of your business and you don't want to meddle. When me and Sue can't run this house we'll let you know. I'm her mother, and I guess I know what's best for her. If you want to stick up for Sam Andrews, instead of your own flesh and blood, go ahead, but it won't do him any good. If you see to the wheat and corn and hogs and things, that'll be 'nuff for you to worry over."

"Didn't I say I wasn't stickin' up for nobody?" protested the husband. "I guess I can ask what's the matter around here without stickin' up, as you call it. Hain't Sue my darter, same as yours?"

"Very well, Tobias, I'll tell you what's the matter," replied the wife as she sat down beside him. "That Sam Andrews went home from Aunt Mary Tabor's quiltin'-bee with one of them Jones girls, — Lucinda Jones. Just took her on his arm and walked off as brassy as you please, and when somebody said Sue would be mad about it he said he didn't care a — a —."

"A what, Mariar?"

"Well, I never swore in my life, and may the Lord forgive me now, but he said he didn't care a con — continental! If I'm struck dead for repeatin' sich awful oaths you'll have to get along the best way you can."

"But Sue wasn't there that night," said the husband.

"No, she wasn't, but that makes no difference. It's the principle me and Sue looks at — the principle and the swearin', to

say nothing of the brass. If Sue had been there alone d'ye 'spose she'd have let one of them Parker boys seen her home — seen her home and said she didn't care a con — continental what Sam Andrews thought about it? Never, Tobias Johnson — never!"

"Must a had a spat afore that."

"Spat! Spat! Sam Andrews was tryin' to boss her, and tellin' that he was goin' to do this and he was goin' to do that, just as if she hadn't no spunk and no mind of her own. She just brung him up with a sudden jerk, same as you do a calf with a rope around it's neck, and he walked off with that Jones girl for spite."

"Well?" queried Tobias as he fought away a flying bug which seemed determined to alight on his nose.

"Well, as he was the one who walked off he can walk back, only as he walks back he's got to humble himself. It's all his fault that there was a quarrel, and me and Sue will give him enough of it afore he's through."

"'Sposin' he never comes back?"

"'Sposin' the sun should fall down on our pig-pen at noon tomorrow! No feller hain't goin' to stand out agin the girl he loves more'n a month or two. He's got to stand out for awhile on account of his pride, but he'll come crawlin' around sooner or later. It's for Sam Andrews to crawl — not Sue Johnson — and don't you worry that he won't do it! Just leave me and Sue alone and it will be all right."

"When there's been a quarrel a feller has got to have a show to crawl, hain't he?" asked the husband after a silence.

"Yes, of course," assented the wife, "and that's what we are goin' to give Sam Andrews. We don't expect to see him come bustin' in here of a night, nor to send her a letter, but there are different ways, Tobias — different ways. Not bein' a woman you can't understand 'em nor help this case one blessed bit. I'm sayin', same as you, that Sam Andrews is a good feller, and he dotes on Sue and she dotes on him; but a young feller is like a calf,— give him too much rope and it ain't good for him. Sue ain't one of the kind to be bossed around like a nigger, and Sam won't step quite so high when he gits through with this thing!"

That ended the conversation. The wife returned to her kitchen, and the husband went down the path to close the barn doors for the night, and stop on his way back to see if the hens had all taken to their roosting-poles. Next day Tobias noticed that lye was running from the leach, and two days later he was asked to get the barrel of soap-grease out of the cellar. Before doing so he said: —

"Ain't you about a month ahead of time on this soft soap business, Mariar?"

"I may be a month ahead or a month behind," she replied, "but that makes no difference to you. I ain't goin' around the neighborhood borrowin' soft soap when I've got all the materials on hand to make it. While you are about it you can get that big kettle out of the woodshed and fix for a fire in the backyard."

"Mariar, how you goin' to fix it about Sue and Sam?" asked the man, as he stood chewing at a twig he had broken off a lilac bush.

"Tobias Johnson, you go along!" she indignantly exclaimed. "I don't know what has got into you lately. I used to brag that you was no hen-hussy, but for the last few days you have gone around pokin' your nose into everything. Didn't I tell you the other day to leave things to me?"

"Yes, you did, but —"

"But you want to poke! That's the way with a man. He'll brag and blow around about havin' no curiosity, and then every time a hen cackles he'll run his legs off to see whether she's laid an egg or been skeart by a skunk! Tobias, you mind your business and get them things ready!"

After supper on the evening of the next day, a fire was started under the big kettle while he was milking the two cows, and he noticed that Sue was attending it. He handed in the milk and stood and watched her for awhile, and then entered the kitchen to say: —

"Mariar, I guess I'll grease that sore finger of mine with a leetle mutton taller; and what's Sue all dressed up for to make soft soap?"

"There's the mutton taller on the shelf," bluntly replied the wife.

He took down the piece of raw tallow, warmed it at the stove, gently rubbed it over the crack in his left fore-finger, and now and then glanced out of the open door at Sue hovering over the soap-kettle. There was some fire and a good deal of smoke. Soft soap had been made in that family for the last twenty-five years, but always by the wife, and always in her old "duds." Sue, who was twenty years old, had never taken any part in the task, except to feed the fire during her childhood. To see her not only take the work off her mother's hands all of a sudden, but to have her "Sunday clothes" on in addition, was a puzzle to the father. He suppressed his curiosity as long as possible, and then replaced the tallow and said: —

"Mariar, Sue's got a mighty funny streak on, seems to me."

"There you go agin!" promptly replied the wife, as she polished away at the bottom of the milk-pan. "I don't see nothin' funny about it. If Sue wants to learn how to make soft soap that's to her credit. Every girl orter know how afore she's married."

"But she needn't put on her Sunday clothes, need she?"

"She can do as she pleases, Tobias Johnson, so long as she earned them clothes teachin' school! If you keep on losin' your senses you'll have to go to an asylum afore the year is out! Now, then, if you can possibly manage to survive for the next hour I'll have sunthin' to tell you. If your curiosity is so great that it will bust you all to flinders then I'll try and give you a decent funeral. Get the chores done up as soon as you can for we're goin' to bed early to-night."

Tobias sauntered out to the fire and looked to see if Sue had placed a sassafras stick across the top of the kettle to keep the contents from boiling over. Then he went down to the barn, the pig-pen, and the hen-house, and by the time he got back to the kitchen it was dark and the housework was done for the night.

"It's only eight o'clock, but we are goin' to bed," said the wife.

"It's an hour too airly," he protested.

"You wind up that clock and come along, and don't lock the door, neither! I used to think you could see through a barn when all the doors was wide open, but I guess you can't. You needn't say nothin' to Sue afore you come upstairs."

"Is she goin' to stay out there all night?" he asked.

"Wind up 'tother side of that clock and come along! I never did see such a thick-headed man in all my born days!"

He finished winding the clock, shut up the stove, left the kitchen door on the latch, and followed his wife upstairs to find her looking out of an open window on the highway. As he sat down in a chair and sighed heavily she asked: —

"Tobias, have you seen Sam Andrews within a day or two?"

"No," he replied, "hain't seen hide nor hair of him."

"Well, I have! He's been right by this very house at least six times in two days. Each time he pretended not to look, but he was lookin' all the time, and he'd have given his old boots to ketch sight of Sue. He's a-dyin' to see her — just a-dyin'."

"How d' ye know he is?"

"'Cause it's natural — just as natural as it is for cats to eat grass afore it's goin' to rain. When we was courtin' we had a quarrel, and you was almost on the point of suicide when I give you a chance to make up. Sue is givin' Sam a chance to crawfish."

"How is she doin' it?" asked the husband with sudden interest.

"Are you stone blind, Tobias? Can't ye see beyond the tip of your nose? Sam Andrews wants to see Sue and say he's sorry and won't never do it again and then make up. He's got pride. His pride won't let him come walkin' into the house to ask for her."

"Then how's he goin' to see her?"

"Land o' massy, but what a man! Seems to me you don't know 'nuff to kick pumpkins about! What's Sue out doors for?"

"To make soft soap."

"But ain't she all alone? It won't be half an hour afore Sam Andrews will come spookin' around and discover that she's all by herself out there. Then what will foller? He'll come and speak to her, and they'll jaw around for awhile and then make up. Me and Sue have been plannin' this thing for two weeks, and yet you couldn't put two and two together!"

"By gum, ma, but I wouldn't a-believed it!" exclaimed the husband as a broad smile came to his wrinkled face and he felt a wave of relief sweep over him.

"Me and Sue ain't chickens!" she replied, with great complacency, as she looked out of the window again.

"And Sam will surely come, will he?"

"Of course he will. Got to come."

"And they'll make up?"

"Bound to; never knowed it to fail. Hear that whistle down the road? That's Sam Andrews as sure's you're born! He's a-whistlin' 'The Sweet By and By,' and he's the only one around here who whistles it. That's Sue's favorite tune, and he knows it, and he wants her to know he's goin' past. I can see him now, and he's walkin' on our side of the road."

"But he's goin' right by," whispered the husband as he got down on his knees beside his wife to peer out.

"But he'll come back — bound to come back. He's jest spyin' out things. There he stops! He sees the fire and he sees Sue, and I'll bet the sweat's startin' out all over him! Oh, he don't care a con — continental what Sue thinks, eh? Well, you'd better believe he does! I can almost hear his heart thumpin' clear up here, and I know he's weak in the knees."

"Is — is he comin' in?" asked the husband with bated breath after a moment.

"He is!" she replied as she settled back a little. "Tobias Johnson, Sam Andrews is climbin' right over the fence and headin' for Sue, and we can go to bed and feel that all will be well tomorrer mornin'."

"But mebbe Sue won't make up," he whispered with alarm in his voice.

"Mebbe you don't know squashes from turnips," replied the wife as she rose up. "Sue's goin' to be upish for awhile, of course, like any other girl that's got spunk, but she won't carry it too far. She'll know when the time comes to give in. Tobias, the Lord be praised, and now we'll leave the rest to Sue. I thought and thought, and I finally struck on makin' soft soap, and it was the very thing to do."

When Sam Andrews saw the fire and the figure moving about he did not wait to open the gate, but climbed the fence instead. Then dodging the grape arbor and the well-curb he passed around to the rear of the house and came to a halt within ten feet of Sue.

She had heard his whistle; she had heard him climbing the fence; she knew he was standing a little ways off. She did not look up. On the contrary, the fire needed fixing just about then, and as she poked the brands together she began to sing. That was to signify that she was not thinking of suicide because of the quarrel. After two or three moments Sam uttered a cough and said: —

"Miss Johnson, I happened to be passing, you know, and I remembered that your father was speaking about some squash seeds. I've hunted 'em up and here they are. I thought it was your father out here, and so I stopped."

"Isn't it rather late in the season to plant squash seeds, Mr. Andrews?" sarcastically inquired Sue as she moved around to the other side of the fire and tried to appear very busy.

"Well, y-e-s, but these are late squashes, you know. Then your — your father isn't out here this evenin'?"

"He doesn't seem to be out here, Mr. Andrews."

"And your mother — is she quite well?"

"She's able to crawl about, thank you."

After a silence of two long minutes, during which the lye reached the boiling point, Sam shuffled his feet uneasily and said: —

"Well, Miss Johnson, I didn't intend to occupy your valuable time, and I beg your pardon, and will be moving along."

"Oh! don't mention it," she replied. "Father will always be glad to see you, with or without squash seeds. Is your ma's rheumatism about the same, Mr. Andrews?"

"About the same, Miss Johnson, thank you. Quite romantic your being out here all alone in the night watching the soap kettle."

"Perhaps it's just as romantic as walking two miles at midnight with Lucinda Jones. How is Lucinda this evening?"

"Who walked two miles with Lucinda Jones at midnight!"

"You did, and as I hear you're engaged I want to congratulate you. Perhaps ma'll give you some of this soap to rub the freckles off her face, but you can never find a cure for her big feet!"

It was half an hour later, and farmer Johnson had fallen asleep, when his wife shook him and whispered: —

"Tobias, you must be mightily concerned about Sue, to go to sleep afore you're in bed a minute! Get up!"

"W-what for?"

"Come along to the back window, and don't you dare cough or sneeze or speak a loud word! There, look at that!"

"Gee-whizz!" exclaimed the husband in her ear, "but it's Sam and Sue! Sam and Sue!"

"Of course it is!"

"And sittin' on the wash-bench right close up to each other!"

"Just so, Tobias."

"And by gum if he haint got his arm around her and is holdin' her hand, and that soap's biled over and put the fire out!"

"Let her bile, Tobias; let her bile! I've got most a barrel full down cellar, and won't have to make any new till fall. And now what d'ye think?"

"Ma Johnson," he whispered, "you've gone and done it!"

"Didn't I say I would?"

"Just planned it all in your own head and carried it out, and Sam and Sue have made up and will get married. Ma, look at me! We was savin' up them six dozen eggs and ten pounds of butter to get me a Sunday hat and a box of paper collars, but to-morrow mornin' you take 'em right to town and buy yourself the nicest dress in all America, and on top of that you may run me in debt for a new pair of shoes!"

"Don't fly off the handle, Tobias Johnson," said the good woman as she kissed him in the darkness and led the way back to their bedroom.

The Camels of Iphi.

BY CHARLES CLAYTON DANA.

HE Arab stumbled, recovered himself, stumbled again, drew his burnoose over his face and fell forward on the hot sands.

"Water, Allah, water," he gasped.

His companion, his own twin brother, laughed a horrible, choking laugh and stumbled on. Suddenly he, too, fell. His legs jerked convulsively for a second or two, and he turned over on his back, exposing his blistered face to the fierce sun. His swollen, cracked lips parted, permitting his parched, dust-laden tongue to protrude horribly. A puff of scorching air blew some sand into his face. More sand drifted over him, some of it sifting into his mouth and nostrils.

The sun went down, a fiery disc in a copper sky. Darkness came on like the rapid fall of a black curtain. Away in the distance a jackal howled. A lion roared, the air quivering with the sound. His mate answered. A buzzard dropped out of the nothingness of the sky, settling some yards away from the prostrate figures. A few large drops of water fell, and both figures stirred uneasily, scaring away for a time the birds of prey. Presently, however, the moon rose, silvering the sands which had been golden only a few hours before. Two long, inky shadows seemed to come out of it, surging across the sands with the rocking dip of the masts of a ship. They were shadows of camels.

The camels came straight towards the motionless men and stopped beside them. They were riderless, and blacker than their shadows. No bridles or housings trammeled them, only garlands and wreaths of snow-white flowers, like patches of virgin snow on volcanic rock. The camels approached fearlessly, each selecting a man. They bent their necks and licked the blistered, feverish faces, the moisture and coarseness of their tongues bringing back consciousness. He who had fallen first was the first to sit up.

He saw the camel, and, not knowing what he did, tried to mount the standing animal, but fell back exhausted. The animal seemed to comprehend the effort, and lay carefully down beside him. Presently the man partly regained his faculties, and, half dazed, got on the camel, burying his face in the sweet, waxen blossoms. Meantime the other man had mounted his camel, experiencing nearly the same difficulties as his brother.

When both were settled the camels set off slowly, going in the direction whence they came. The riders began mechanically to eat the flowers of the garlands, getting food and drink out of the sweet buds. All night the camels kept at their long, swinging trot, and when morning came the men saw they were approaching an oasis. Like an emerald dropped on a cloth of gold it was, and as the men drew nearer they caught the shimmer of falling water. Suddenly they made a simultaneous effort to stop the black beasts.

"Iphi! The Oasis of the Bubble," they cried, their voices quaking with terror.

Instead of stopping, the camels redoubled their speed, and their riders were carried resistlessly towards the place which they had learned to fear with the greatest of dreads.

The Oasis of the Bubble is the fairest spot in the desert. It is the Garden of Eden of the Sahara, yet it was more feared by the two Arabs than sacrilege. Their father had disappeared into it, and for many years the greatest of the family had vanished there. A long time ago one of the family had come back mortally wounded. Before he died he had talked of houris and of the Gates of Heaven, but he was delirious. It was certain, however, that there dwelt there two women, two enchantresses, perhaps. Then, too, these very same men had viewed the desert from afar and had come upon the bodies of men lately killed. The faces were peaceful, even happy, but this only terrified the beholders the more. The corpses were naked save for garlands of white flowers.

The Oasis itself is simply a freak of nature. The ground is covered with thick, soft verdure. Many-colored blossoms stud its surface. Tall, graceful trees cast queer light and dark patterns over it. The air is cooled by the presence of water and laden

with aromatic odors. Bees buzz among the flowers and gay-plumaged birds flit about overhead. But the wonder of the place is the great Bubble. A porous stone, taller than two camels and round as a bullet, rests in the center of the place. Out of a cuplike dent in its top bubbles a cool, sparkling spring, which overflows the side of the cup evenly and ripples down the sides of the stone, a crystal bubble on the grass. It was the presence of this bit of unnatural nature which helped to make the Arabs superstitious.

The camels stopped near the Bubble under a bush flowering with the same blossoms as those on the animals' necks. The men fell rather than jumped from the camels, throwing themselves on their faces, and calling upon Allah to protect them. Suddenly there rose from the depths of the Bubble the sound of women singing,— or angels. The song was distinct but low, yet it stirred the Arabs like the deep tones of a bell or the chant of a battle song. They shivered and lay still. The water parted where it was whitest with bubbles and a woman appeared. The Arabs were the chiefs of their tribe, and had seen many beautiful women, but none like this one. They were in the presence of an houri. They thought of all the tales about the place and prepared stolidly to meet their fate. Again the waters parted and another woman stood before them. She was dark, the first was fair. Yet the Dark One was fairer than any of the daughters of the desert. The spray from the water through which she had just passed rested like jewels upon her hair. Her eyes fell tenderly and pityingly on the cowering Arabs. The Fair One was queenly and cold. Her face had no compassion, only the joy of triumph rested there.

"Sister," she said, and her voice was as the tinkling of a silver bell, "our black servants have returned at the appointed time, but one of their burdens must perish."

The Dark One bowed as to the inevitable.

"Sweet one," she answered, and her voice was full and deep and told of a soul that had love for the whole world, "I grieve that either of these glorious beings should perish. It is written, however, there can be but one slave, and the duel must be fought."

Both women turned as with a single thought and passed through

the watery curtain. They both came out again carrying harnesses of silver and ivory for the camels, but the Dark One brought food for the men also. She ministered to them, bathing their sand-grimed faces and giving them cooling draughts. The Fair One paid no attention to the sufferers, but set to work harnessing the camels, with a certain exultation as of anticipated pleasure.

Strength came with the wine, but with strength came overpowering fear, and the men would have fallen down and worshiped these strange, fair women, who dwelt alone in the desert.

"My poor sons," whispered the Dark One, trying to soothe them.

Both camels were ready, each equipped with a silver bridle and a carved ivory houdah. In the houdahs were silken cushions for two. Each woman mounted a beast.

"Sister," said the Dark One, and her voice rang with compassion, "can we not forego the ordeal?"

The Fair One made no direct reply. Instead, she turned to the quaking Arabs.

"Strangers," she commanded, "be men and listen."

The men clutched the grass as a frightened child grasps the dress of its mother, but they rose slowly.

"We have never seen you," the Fair One continued, "but we know you. You are twins, and wear the purple of the chieftains of the tribes of Kôn. Your father served us, aye, your grandfather and his father also. One of you must also serve. You are equals as drivers. Choose you, each, one of us and mount beside us. We are the Daughters of the Bubble, and it shelters us. One of you must enter also, but as a slave. The other dies. The camels are equal in speed, but I am lighter than my sister. Choose and mount."

The men glared at one another. They were brothers, but the desire for life had made them enemies. Each hurried to the animal nearest him and scrambled up. Their muscles and faculties were strained to the utmost. They never considered that they were men dealing with women. The superstitions of the place were upon them. Each was determined to save himself by the life of the other. Better to be a slave than dead.

"Dear one, courage," whispered the Dark One, kissing the burning cheek of her driver.

The Fair One drew a slender jeweled dagger. She pressed it lightly to her finger. A drop of blood, a red flower on snow, followed its withdrawal. "My sister," she said, her voice tinkling musically, "has a start of half a league. If her driver can keep ahead of mine for six leagues, I shall kill mine with this," and she held up the slender weapon with a drop of red blood clinging to its shining point. "If, however, I pass her, she must kill her driver. Sister, have you your toy?"

The Dark One showed a long, needle-like knife with a carved ivory handle. It was not jeweled like her sister's.

The camels began to move. At the edge of the Oasis the Fair One stopped hers. It grumbled and protested, but its driver held it with a firm hand. The coldness of the fate-like maiden at his side seemed to have entered his soul. His face wore the resolute air of anticipated victory. The other man drove his camel poorly. His hand trembled and a mist obscured his eyes. He had a premonition of his fate. The maiden looked at him pityingly. "Take heart, poor love," she said, laying a cool hand gently on his hot forehead, "we will win together."

He turned, and a sudden resolve showed in his eyes. "Sweet Lady," he said, reining in the camel and speaking rapidly, "we are not at the starting point yet. Kill me now. Think not that I fear the agony of delay, for I am certain I shall lose. Even if my brother should be unable to pass me, yet I should permit him. A minute ago I was forgetful of that, and would have killed him gladly to save myself; but now, thanks be to Allah, I am myself again. My mother gave him to me to protect, and I must."

A proud, happy light shone in the Dark One's eyes. "Speak not so, dear love," she said; "if you should die, the world would no longer be beautiful for me. Many men have come, and some have ridden the Race of Death, but none have won my heart as you have done. You must win."

"Dear Lady," answered the Arab, "I know not who you are, but I know you are a good woman. Treat the winner of this race gently, for I see your sister is different from you."

The light of the new resolve was still in his eyes. The Dark Maiden saw it and tears welled to her eyes, but she smiled a glorious smile. She knew how it would end. The Arab felt

that she read his secret thoughts. He bent and kissed the hem of her garment. "Sweet Lady," he said, "whatever good you can get from my poor love, that you have. The clouds would love the moon, and they pass beneath her feet. I am the lowliest of those clouds."

And now they came to the starting point. Only the white dress of the Fair One sharply outlined against the dark green of the Oasis marked the place of the other Arab.

The Dark Maiden stood up in the houdah. "My driver," she said, "I will flash my dagger in the sun. The instant you see the flash of my sister's dagger, start. Are you ready?"

The Arab leaned down and patted the neck of his camel. Against his will, a desire to win was rising in his heart. "Yes," he answered.

A flash of light moved across the green of the distant Oasis, and almost immediately the Arab was partly blinded by the answering flash. The camel seemed to have caught the flash and understood it, for he started off swiftly. The Arab looked around. His eye rested a second on the Dark Maiden, then it traveled to the distant moving speck. "My poor brother, dear love," he whispered softly.

He bent his head and drove the camel straight and swiftly, yet taking care to husband the animal's strength. "My poor brother, my sweet Lady," he murmured again.

He looked around. The other animal was approaching rapidly. Evidently it was going at the top of its speed. It had the long, resistless heave of a wave in deep water. He smiled. His camel had not begun to draw on its reserve force, and yet the other was having a hard time to overtake him. The Dark One looked behind, then she looked ahead. She was trembling with excitement.

"Yonder rock," she said, pointing to a speck on the horizon, "is the goal."

The Arab only bowed his head.

"My poor brother, forgive me," he thought. "I cannot die!"

And now the other camel was only a few feet behind. The Fair One rose exultant. She carried a whip. Great drops of perspiration stood on the brow of her driver. His face was drawn and anxious. The Fair One said something to him. He applied

the goad. The camel made an effort, and his neck came opposite to the houdah of the Dark One's camel.

"We win," cried the Fair One triumphantly, "On, on!"

The Dark One's driver bent and shook loose the bridle.

His camel shot ahead like a stone from a catapult, increasing the distance between the Dark Maiden, his Fate, and the Fair One, another Fate.

The driver of the Fair applied the goad and the whip, but vainly. The Fair One sat down quietly, and drew out her jeweled dagger. The driver of the Dark One looked back.

"My poor brother," he cried; "we win, dear love, we win."

"Yes," answered the Dark One sadly, "the rock is very near."

Her driver turned swiftly and caught the look in her eye. The muscles in his back grew tense. The camel's mouth opened. His driver was pulling very hard on the bridle. The camel shook his head. There was a snap. The bridle had parted.

"Allah wills me to win," began the Arab. Then he said suddenly, "Lady, give me your knife."

He took the weapon quickly, and, leaning far down, slashed at the camel's leg. The beast went lame. The Arab took the knife, and at that instant the other camel passed them. The Dark Maiden waved her hand at her sister.

"Wait for me at the Gates of Paradise," she whispered, kissing the Arab again, "I shall not be long."

With a cool, sure hand she drove the dagger into her driver's heart. He pitched forward on the sands, dyeing them with his blood. The camel stopped. The Dark One stood up and blew a kiss lovingly after her sister. Then she, too, fell on the sands with the same dagger in her heart, mingling her blood with the blood of her driver. The camel licked their faces wonderingly. The White Maiden turned and drove by proud and cold, never looking at the two on the sands. In her hands she held a whip, and across the face of the driver was a large welt.

Mr. Jones's Dream.

BY EDWARD ROBINS.

"SEVEN o'clock, and first call to breakfast," cried the lazy colored porter of the Overland Express, which was speeding, with occasional jerks and thumps, on its way to San Francisco, twenty-four hours out from Chicago. Mr. Felarty Jones, aroused from a deep but apparently unrefreshing slumber, stretched his thin limbs on the hard mattress of his upper Pullman berth and started in for the serious affairs of the day. He was a gentle-looking little man, with a face that a novelist would have described as mobile. There were deep wrinkles about his mouth (although he could not have been a day over forty) and a preoccupied, puzzling air about him which might have stamped him as anything seriously inclined, from a country postmaster to a horse jockey. Having slept in half his clothing, his toilet did not consume much time. He pulled on a faded pepper-and-salt suit, relieved by a blue waistcoat variegated with yellow polka dots, and attached to his rumpled white shirt a collar that bore the dust and cinders of a previous day's journey. Then he donned a soft greenish cravat and a battered felt hat, and descending from his berth with the agility and grace of a cat, made his way to the end of the car set apart, according to the euphemistic proclamation of the Pullman Palace Car Company, for the ablutions of "gentlemen." Mr. Jones had dressed with the quickness of a soldier, but he was by no means the first to seek the comfort vouchsafed by the cheap soap, muddy water, and suspicious towels of this resort. There were three travelers in the place when he entered. One was a fat, luxuriously appointed fellow, with a Jewish cast of countenance, whose appearance suggested diamonds and a well-filled pocketbook; the second was a clergyman, to judge from external signs, while the third bore all the marks of an ultra-Bostonian

out for an intellectual holiday. All three had spent part of the previous afternoon with the mild-mannered Jones in the smoking car, and so, when the latter appeared on the scene, unkempt and haggard, there was a general inquiry as to how he had passed the night.

"Poorly, very poorly," he sighed, with a woe-begone expression. "I had a wretched dream that woke me up with a start about three o'clock, and after that the horror of the thing kept me from sleeping for several hours."

"A bad dream! Dear me! dear me!" softly murmured the clergyman, as he vainly tried to brush his thin golden hair, while the train went around a curve at the rate of sixty miles an hour. "I can imagine nothing worse. I dreamed the other night that my choir turned Anarchists and refused to sing unless my salary was reduced one half — with the result that I woke up in a frightful perspiration."

"What is it Shakespeare says about dreams?" asked the young Bostonian, who was eking out the somewhat inadequate poetry of his honeymoon by copious drafts upon the accumulated stock of literature — "the children of an idle brain, begot — begot —"

"Dey aind't no need of schvearing aboudt it," interrupted the Israelite, misapprehending the participle and rushing into the breach in the speaker's memory with anxious solicitude for the feelings of the clergyman. "Vot vas your dream, Mr. Chones? Vot vas it aboudt?" he gently inquired, as he took off his diamond ring preparatory to washing his dimpled hands.

Thus questioned, Mr. Jones gave a shudder; the pupils of his faded yellow eyes dilated, and there came into his face a look of terrible resolve, as though he were about to discharge a frightful but none the less imperative duty. "Gentlemen," he exclaimed excitedly, "you probably have no faith in dreams! No more have I. Yet when you or I, or any of us, have a vision of evil — a premonition of the future — what do we do? Do we sit down and forget it? Do we find comfort in some dinkey quotation?" Here he glowered triumphantly at his Shakespearean critic. "No, sir! We feel upon our souls the dark shadow of an impending misfortune."

The favored recipient of divine warning emitted a blood-curdling groan at this point, glanced nervously around him, and continued: —

"Has not our great Longfellow spoken of 'Death and his brother, Sleep'?" (He meant Shelley, but in his zeal to demonstrate his intellectual parity with the Bostonian he made this pardonable miscue.) "Well, gentlemen, my sleep last night had to do with death. I dreamed that we were approaching the high trestle-work at El Paso Del Forte — we are due there this evening at eight o'clock, I think — when suddenly a grinning skeleton blocked the passage of the engine, and with specter-like arms beckoned the engineer to stop. Thrice did he wave us back, and thrice did he swing a ghastly red light across the track; but no one seemed to see him but myself. I, for some reason, was the only one conscious of the awful warning. The engineer slept at his post; the fireman looked into the pitch darkness ahead of him and saw nothing. I tried to cry out,— in my dream I thought I had a place in the locomotive cab,— but my parched throat refused me utterance, and with a feeling of horror which I cannot describe, I felt the train touch the fatal trestle. There was a crash, a sound of breaking timbers, piercing shrieks from a hundred voices, and then — I awoke. This, sirs, is all I have to tell, yet until we have passed over that wretched trestle to-night I shall not feel comfortable."

Mr. Jones's narrative had by no means an enlivening effect on his three listeners, yet when he finished a general desire to make light of it was noticeable. Mr. Oberstein, he of the diamonds and dimpled paws, remarked, with a grunt of displeasure: "For goodness' sake! Vot did you eat for tinner last efening, aind't it?" The Rev. Mr. Alban agreed that such a dream was merely a result of indigestion — something that might easily be forgotten by any one having faith in Providence; and Mr. Worcester Beebee, the Boston Benedict, observed contemptuously that these childish superstitions were melancholy survivals from the dark ages of the human mind.

"Of course, gentlemen, of course," replied Mr. Jones, with the air of a martyr going to the stake; "it's very foolish to grow anxious over the thing, but then, nature's nature." With which

parting bit of philosophy he completed his unambitious toilet, glided softly from the place, and spent the remainder of the day, barring intervals for refreshments, in the Bohemian precincts of the smoking car, wrapped in a cloud of Napoleonic gloom and tobacco smoke.

When the Rev. Mr. Alban and his delicate-looking little wife sat down to breakfast they found themselves opposite Mr. and Mrs. Worcester Beebee. Now Mrs. Beebee, albeit a blushing bride of twenty-five, was a lady of decided views, with a present ascendancy over her husband which promised his entire subjugation before the passing of many moons of wedded bliss. "I always want to know what Worcester has been about when he's not near me," she had said to one of her fellow-passengers, and in pursuance of this vigilant policy she had easily wormed from him all that Mr. Jones had revealed. Thus, when Mrs. Alban, tired and hungry, came to table, and the two husbands had introduced their respective wives, Mrs. Beebee at once burst out with, "I hope you're not a nervous woman, Mrs. Alban, for if you are, that dream of Mr. Somebody or Other Jones is enough to take away your appetite for the day."

The clergyman, who had purposely kept the story from his spouse, instantly frowned violently at Beebee, hoping that the latter would head off the loquacious bride. Alas! it was to no purpose. Mr. Beebee was already too well trained to stop his better half in the midst of a piece of gossip, and so the unfortunate Mrs. Alban was treated to the full horrors of Mr. Jones's dream, embellished with a few highly colored additions, the whole ending with a dramatic reminder that "dreams often come true."

Mrs. Alban had ordered a good breakfast, but this recital was too much for her. After toying with a piece of cantaloupe, gulping down some coffee, and trying to assure her new-found friends that she wasn't at all nervous, she left the dining car with a fast-developing case of hysterical sick headache. Mr. Alban, with an injured glare at the Beebees, ran after her, and was soon busily engaged in an adjoining sleeper, hunting through a shabby cabas for smelling-salts, ammonia, and a tiny vial of whiskey labeled "For use only in great emergencies." Kind-hearted Mrs. Oberstein, whose five children stood placidly watching Mrs. Alban's progress

toward hysterics, now came to the rescue in motherly fashion, and putting one plump arm around the slim waist of the minister's wife, said tenderly, "Cheer up, mine tear, cheer up, und tell me vot is your trouble all aboudt it." Then she trumpeted a sort of elephantine snort in the direction of the distracted Alban, as much as to say, "It's all your fault, you brute, I know it is." But the patient soon absolved him from any guilt in the matter for, bursting into tears, she sank her head on the expansive but plebeian shoulder of Mrs. Oberstein, and, with occasional intervals of weeping, recounted how that horrid Mr. Jones had dreamed a still more horrid dream.

As this recital proceeded, a vast fear slowly filled the capacious bosom of Mrs. Oberstein, and at its conclusion, catching sight of her lord and master as he returned from breakfast with the air of a conqueror, she promptly abandoned Mrs. Alban and threw herself into his arms.

"Oscar, Oscar," she screamed, "take us off de train; somet'ing fearful is going to habben, und ve shall all be killed."

This was enough for the little Obersteins, three of whom, with wailings of deep despair, immediately clung to the sturdy legs of their male parent, while the two youngest threw themselves on the floor and bellowed like young bulls. As may be imagined, this scene was watched with painful attention by the several other occupants of the sleeper, who soon knew the whole story.

Matters became more and more interesting. A clean-shaven and highly dignified gentleman from Philadelphia reminded Mr. Alban that it happened to be the thirteenth of the month, and that in his own family the thirteenth had always been a most unlucky day. "Only last month," he added solemnly, "my wife's mother and my cook both died on the thirteenth, and the month before that, on the same day, my most expensive horse ran away through Rittenhouse Square and broke his neck."

A Mr. Van Snorter, of New York, recalled that several years ago he was traveling with a conductor who had a strange presentiment that something was about to happen, and something did happen, sure enough. The train struck a cow, the engine was derailed, and the fireman was killed outright. Mrs. Van Snorter suggested, at this point, that trestles were usually made of wood,

and had an uncomfortable way of getting on fire. Ergo, the El Paso del Forte trestle might now be in ashes.

Altogether, it promised to be an unenviable day for the unfortunate people on the Overland Express. The story of the dream gradually spread throughout the length of the train, so that even the colored porters began to take on an ashen-gray hue. When the innocent cause of all the commotion, the limp and modest Jones, ventured to return to his compartment for a moment, he was greeted by such a terrible array of angry glances (as though the poor man could control his dreams) that he slunk back into the seclusion of the smoker. But he had a conscience and a heart, and as soon as the conductor passed his way he pleaded with him earnestly to have the train stopped half a mile from the trestle. "Not that I myself have the least fear," he hastened to explain, "but merely as an act of mercy to the ladies. They have heard of my dream, and are so wrought up about it that something should be done to allay their alarm. Now if the engine is stopped this side of the El Paso del Forte Chasm, and a brakeman is sent on to examine the trestle, sees that it is still standing, and comes back at once to report the good news, then we can all continue the journey with hearts light as larks."

Evidently the conductor had no sympathy for hearts light as larks, for he sternly refused to do anything of the kind. Not only was the suggestion absurd, but there was, furthermore, the certainty that he would "lose his job" if he allowed "such a piece of nonsense." Mr. Jones sighed at this ultimatum. He had done his duty, and more than that he could not accomplish. So he lighted another bad cigar, and relapsed into a melancholy revery.

Lunch that day suggested a discussion of funeral baked meats. Mrs. Worcester Beebee had a wan, strained look on her usually strong-minded face; Mrs. Alban, with red eyelids and a powerful smell of salts and ammonia, refused everything brought to her by the waiter; while the expansive Mrs. Oberstein conversed in excited tones about the cowardice of men who wouldn't take it upon themselves to stop a train, and save the lives of innocent women and children. The aforesaid men had a sheepish air about them, but few dared to venture any opinions. To be sure, an unman-

nerly Westerner was heard to say something like "Rot," but an Amazonian glance of frozen displeasure from a lady from Baltimore put a stop to further remarks from so boorish a quarter.

The gentlemen stole off one by one to the smoking car, where they discovered the subdued Jones eating an orange given him by the tender-hearted barber. "Friends," said Mr. Jones, as he rose slowly from the sofa as the last man entered, "I have been, through no intention of my own, the cause of much suffering. Let me do all I can to atone. The conductor refuses my request to stop the train a short distance from El Paso del Forte, on the ground that he would be discharged for so doing. To quiet his fears let us make up a purse large enough to protect him from any such contingency. I shall head the list myself, gentlemen, with a hundred dollars."

From that moment Mr. Jones became the most popular passenger on board the train. Seven hundred dollars was quickly subscribed, the refractory conductor was as quickly brought to the proper frame of mind, and a mighty load was lifted from every one's mind. The time passed rapidly, six o'clock dinner was consumed with zest and rapidity, and by half past seven, when the lamps were all lighted, every one was on the alert.

About five minutes of eight, when within half a mile of the dreaded trestle-work, the engineer was signaled, and the cars were brought to a standstill. At the same moment armed, masked men appeared, one at every door on the train; the engineer found himself gagged almost as soon as he got down from the locomotive, the fireman shared the same fate, and the conductor and brakeman were promptly covered by pistols as they reached the ground. The front door of the first sleeper was heard to open, there was a deprecating little cough by way of introduction, and Mr. Jones, the modest and mystical Jones, was revealed to the astounded travelers. He had a "bulldog" revolver in one hand, a large carpet-bag was grasped by the other.

"Gentlemen," he said politely but firmly, "you must pardon this unlooked-for *dénoûment*" (he pronounced it deenoomong), "but the fact is that I am a trifle short of funds, and so must adopt this way of turning an honest penny. You need only keep perfectly still, and no harm will happen to you. Otherwise my

friends at the door will be reluctantly obliged to make things lively."

And with this elegant preliminary, Mr. Jones walked mournfully through the whole train, relieving stupefied men and half-fainting women of money, jewelry, and a variety of valuable articles. As he searched the last passenger in the end car he cried out cheerfully: "Don't fear the trestle; I can assure you that, despite my dream, it is perfectly safe. Only in future remember"—and here his eyes rested humorously upon the haggard countenance of Mr. Worcester Beebee, which glared at him from between the curtains of his berth — "that in this age of reason it never pays to be superstitious."

With this he vanished; there was a shrill whistle, and the masked watchers in the several cars ran to the platforms and disappeared in the darkness.

"At least," chirped the Rev. Mr. Alban with Christian cheerfulness, as the paralyzed victims began to recover speech, "the conductor can give us back that seven hundred dollars."

"I wish to heaven I could," ruefully replied the latter, "but your friend, Mr. Jones, never turned it over to me."